

THE UPANISHADS

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE SANSKRIT

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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PENGUIN BOOKS

THE UPANISHADS

of love-longing'. As Tadvanam he should have adoration. All beings will love such a lover of the Lord.

Master. You asked me to explain the *Upanishad*, the sacred wisdom. The *Upanishad* has been explained to you. In truth I have been telling you the sacred teaching concerning Brahman.



KATHA UPANISHAD

PART I

VAJASRAVASA gave away all his possessions at a sacrifice; but it was out of desire for heaven.

He had a son called Nachiketas who, although he was only a boy, had a vision of faith when the offerings were given and thus he thought:

'This poor offering of cows that are too old to give milk and too weak to eat grass or drink water must lead to a world of sorrow.'

And he thought of offering himself, and said to his father: 'Father, to whom will you give me?' He asked once, and twice, and three times; and then his father answered in anger: 'I will give you to Death.'

Nachiketas. At the head of many I go, and I go in the midst of many. What may be the work of Death that today must be done through me?

Remember how the men of old passed away, and how those of days to come will also pass away: a mortal ripens like corn, and like corn is born again.

Nachiketas had to wait three nights without food in the abode of YAMA, the god of death.

A Voice. As the spirit of fire a Brahmin comes to a house: bring the offering of water, O god of Death.

How unwise is the man who does not give hospitality to a Brahmin! He loses his future hopes, his past merits, his present possessions: his sons and his all.

Death. Since you have come as a sacred guest to my abode, and you have had no hospitality for three nights, choose then three boons.

Nachiketas. May my father's anger be appeased, and may

he remember me and welcome me when I return to him. Let this be my first boon.

Death. By my power your father will remember you and love you as before; and when he sees you free from the jaws of death, sweet will be his sleep at night.

Nachiketas. There is no fear in heaven: old age and death are not there. The good, beyond both, rejoice in heaven, beyond hunger and thirst and sorrow.

And those in heaven attain immortality. You know, O Death, that sacred fire which leads to heaven. Explain it to me, since I have faith. Be this my second boon.

Death. I know, Nachiketas, that sacred fire which leads to heaven. Listen. That fire which is the means of attaining the infinite worlds, and is also their foundation, is hidden in the sacred place of the heart.

And Death told him of the fire of creation, the beginning of the worlds, and of the altar of the fire-sacrifice, of how many bricks it should be built and how they should be placed. Nachiketas repeated the teaching. Death was pleased and went on:

A further boon I give you today. This fire of sacrifice shall be known by your name. Take also from me this chain of many forms.

One who lights three times this sacred fire, and attains union with the Three, and performs the three holy actions, passes beyond life and death; for then he knows the god of fire, the god who knows all things, and through knowledge and adoration he attains the peace supreme.

He who, knowing the Three, builds up the altar of fire-sacrifice and performs three times the sacrifice of Nachiketas, casts off the bonds of death and, passing beyond sorrow, finds joy in the regions of heaven.

This is the fire that leads to heaven which you chose as the second gift. Men will call it the fire-sacrifice of Nachiketas. Choose now the third boon.

Nachiketas. When a man dies, this doubt arises: some say 'he is' and some say 'he is not'. Teach me the truth.

Death. Even the gods had this doubt in times of old; for mysterious is the law of life and death. Ask for another boon. Release me from this.

Nachiketas. This doubt indeed arose even to the gods, and you say, O Death, that it is difficult to understand; but no greater teacher than you can explain it, and there is no other boon so great as this.

Death. Take horses and gold and cattle and elephants; choose sons and grandsons that shall live a hundred years. Have vast expanses of land, and live as many years as you desire.

Or choose another gift that you think equal to this, and enjoy it with wealth and long life. Be a ruler of this vast earth. I will grant you all your desires.

Ask for any wishes in the world of mortals, however hard to obtain. To attend on you I will give you fair maidens with chariots and musical instruments. But ask me not, Nachiketas, the secrets of death.

Nachiketas. All these pleasures pass away, O End of all! They weaken the power of life. And indeed how short is all life! Keep thy horses and dancing and singing.

Man cannot be satisfied with wealth. Shall we enjoy wealth with you in sight? Shall we live whilst you are in power? I can only ask for the boon I have asked.

When a mortal here on earth has felt his own immortality, could he wish for a long life of pleasures, for the lust of deceitful beauty?

Solve then the doubt as to the great beyond. Grant me the gift that unveils the mystery. This is the only gift Nachiketas can ask.

PART 2

Death. There is the path of joy, and there is the path of pleasure. Both attract the soul. Who follows the first comes to good; who follows pleasure reaches not the End.

The two paths lie in front of man. Pondering on them,

the wise man chooses the path of joy; the fool takes the path of pleasure.

You have pondered, Nachiketas, on pleasures and you have rejected them. You have not accepted that chain of possessions wherewith men bind themselves and beneath which they sink.

There is the path of wisdom and the path of ignorance. They are far apart and lead to different ends. You are, Nachiketas, a follower of the path of wisdom: many pleasures tempt you not.

Abiding in the midst of ignorance, thinking themselves wise and learned, fools go aimlessly hither and thither, like blind led by the blind.

What lies beyond life shines not to those who are childish, or careless, or deluded by wealth. 'This is the only world: there is no other', they say; and thus they go from death to death.

Not many hear of him; and of those not many reach him. Wonderful is he who can teach about him; and wise is he who can be taught. Wonderful is he who knows him when taught.

He cannot be taught by one who has not reached him; and he cannot be reached by much thinking. The way to him is through a Teacher who has seen him: He is higher than the highest thoughts, in truth above all thought.

This sacred knowledge is not attained by reasoning; but it can be given by a true Teacher. As your purpose is steady you have found him. May I find another pupil like you!

I know that treasures pass away and that the Eternal is not reached by the transient. I have thus laid the fire of sacrifice of Nachiketas, and by burning in it the transient I have reached the Eternal.

Before your eyes have been spread, Nachiketas, the fulfilment of all desire, the dominion of the world, the eternal reward of ritual, the shore where there is no fear, the greatness of fame and boundless spaces. With strength and wisdom you have renounced them all.

When the wise rests his mind in contemplation on our God beyond time, who invisibly dwells in the mystery of things and in the heart of man, then he rises above pleasures and sorrow.

When a man has heard and has understood and, finding the essence, reaches the Inmost, then he finds joy in the Source of joy. Nachiketas is a house open for thy Atman, thy God.

Nachiketas. Tell me what you see beyond right and wrong, beyond what is done or not done, beyond past and future.

Death. I will tell you the Word that all the Vedas glorify, all self-sacrifice expresses, all sacred studies and holy life seek. That Word is OM.

That Word is the everlasting Brahman: that Word is the highest End. When that sacred Word is known, all longings are fulfilled.

It is the supreme means of salvation: it is the help supreme. When that great Word is known, one is great in the heaven of Brahman.

Atman, the Spirit of vision, is never born and never dies. Before him there was nothing, and he is ONE for evermore. Never-born and eternal, beyond times gone or to come, he does not die when the body dies.

If the slayer thinks that he kills, and if the slain thinks that he dies, neither knows the ways of truth. The Eternal in man cannot kill: the Eternal in man cannot die.

Concealed in the heart of all beings is the Atman, the Spirit, the Self; smaller than the smallest atom, greater than the vast spaces. The man who surrenders his human will leaves sorrows behind, and beholds the glory of the Atman by the grace of the Creator.

Resting, he wanders afar; sleeping, he goes everywhere. Who else but my Self can know that God of joy and of sorrows?

When the wise realize the omnipresent Spirit, who rests invisible in the visible and permanent in the impermanent, then they go beyond sorrow.

Not through much learning is the Atman reached, not through the intellect and sacred teaching. It is reached by the chosen of him – because they choose him. To his chosen the Atman reveals his glory.

Not even through deep knowledge can the Atman be reached, unless evil ways are abandoned, and there is rest in the senses, concentration in the mind and peace in one's heart.

Who knows in truth where he is? The majesty of his power carries away priests and warriors, and death itself is carried away.

PART 3

In the secret high place of the heart there are two beings who drink the wine of life in the world of truth. Those who know Brahman, those who keep the five sacred fires and those who light the three-fold fire of Nachiketas call them 'light' and 'shade'.

May we light the sacred fire of Nachiketas, the bridge to cross to the other shore where there is no fear, the supreme everlasting Spirit!

Know the Atman as Lord of a chariot; and the body as the chariot itself. Know that reason is the charioteer; and the mind indeed is the reins.

The horses, they say, are the senses; and their paths are the objects of sense. When the soul becomes one with the mind and the senses he is called 'one who has joys and sorrows'.

He who has not right understanding and whose mind is never steady is not the ruler of his life, like a bad driver with wild horses.

But he who has right understanding and whose mind is ever steady is the ruler of his life, like a good driver with well-trained horses.

He who has not right understanding, is careless and never pure, reaches not the End of the journey; but wanders on from death to death.

But he who has understanding, is careful and ever pure, reaches the End of the journey, from which he never returns.

The man whose chariot is driven by reason, who watches and holds the reins of his mind, reaches the End of the journey, the supreme everlasting Spirit.

Beyond the senses are their objects, and beyond the objects is the mind. Beyond the mind is pure reason, and beyond reason is the Spirit in man.

Beyond the Spirit in man is the Spirit of the universe, and beyond is Purusha, the Spirit Supreme. Nothing is beyond Purusha: He is the End of the path.

The light of the Atman, the Spirit, is invisible, concealed in all beings. It is seen by the seers of the subtle, when their vision is keen and is clear.

The wise should surrender speech in mind, mind in the knowing self, the knowing self in the Spirit of the universe, and the Spirit of the universe in the Spirit of peace.

Awake, arise! Strive for the Highest, and be in the Light! Sages say the path is narrow and difficult to tread, narrow as the edge of a razor.

The Atman is beyond sound and form, without touch and taste and perfume. It is eternal, unchangeable, and without beginning or end: indeed above reasoning. When consciousness of the Atman manifests itself, man becomes free from the jaws of death.

The wise who can learn and can teach this ancient story of Nachiketas, taught by Yama, the god of death, finds glory in the world of Brahman.

He who, filled with devotion, recites this supreme mystery at the gathering of Brahmins, or at the ceremony of the Sradha for the departed, prepares for Eternity, he prepares in truth for Eternity.

PART 4

The Creator made the senses outward-going: they go to the world of matter outside, not to the Spirit within. But

a sage who sought immortality looked within himself and found his own Soul.

The foolish run after outward pleasures and fall into the snares of vast-embracing death. But the wise have found immortality, and do not seek the Eternal in things that pass away.

This by which we perceive colours and sounds, perfumes and kisses of love; by which alone we attain knowledge; by which verily we can be conscious of anything:

This in truth is That.

When the wise knows that it is through the great and omnipresent Spirit in us that we are conscious in waking or in dreaming, then he goes beyond sorrow.

When he knows the Atman, the Self, the inner life, who enjoys like a bee the sweetness of the flowers of the senses, the Lord of what was and of what will be, then he goes beyond fear:

This in truth is That.

The god of creation, who in the beginning was born from the fire of thought before the waters were; who appeared in the elements and rests, having entered the heart:

This in truth is That.

The goddess of Infinity who comes as Life-power and Nature; who was born from the elements and rests, having entered the heart:

This in truth is That.

Agni, the all-knowing god of fire, hidden in the two friction fire-sticks of the holy sacrifice, as a seed of life in the womb of a mother, who receives the morning adoration of those who follow the path of light or the path of work:

This in truth is That.

Whence the rising sun does come, and into which it sets again; wherein all the gods have their birth, and beyond which no man can go:

This in truth is That.

What is here is also there, and what is there is also here.

Who sees the many and not the ONE, wanders on from death to death.

Even by the mind this truth is to be learned: there are not many but only ONE. Who sees variety and not the unity wanders on from death to death.

The soul dwells within us, a flame the size of a thumb. When it is known as the Lord of the past and the future, then ceases all fear:

This in truth is That.

Like a flame without smoke, the size of a thumb, is the soul; the Lord of the past and the future, the same both today and tomorrow:

This in truth is That.

As water raining on a mountain-ridge runs down the rocks on all sides, so the man who only sees variety of things runs after them on all sides.

But as pure water raining on pure water becomes one and the same, so becomes, O Nachiketas, the soul of the sage who knows.

PART 5

The pure eternal Spirit dwells in the castle of eleven gates of the body. By ruling this castle, man is free from sorrows and, free from all bondage, attains liberation.

'In space he is the sun, and he is the wind and the sky; at the altar he is the priest, and the Soma wine in the jar. He dwells in men and in gods, in righteousness and in the vast heavens. He is in the earth and the waters and in the rocks of the mountains. He is Truth and Power.'

The powers of life adore that god who is in the heart, and he rules the breath of life, breathing in and breathing out.

When the ties that bind the Spirit to the body are unloosed and the Spirit is set free, what remains then?

This in truth is That.

A mortal lives not through that breath that flows in and

that flows out. The source of his life is another and this causes the breath to flow.

I will now speak to you of the mystery of the eternal Brahman; and of what happens to the soul after death.

The soul may go to the womb of a mother and thus obtain a new body. It even may go into trees or plants, according to its previous wisdom and work.

There is a Spirit who is awake in our sleep and creates the wonder of dreams. He is Brahman, the Spirit of Light, who in truth is called the Immortal. All the worlds rest on that Spirit and beyond him no one can go:

This in truth is That.

As fire, though one, takes new forms in all things that burn, the Spirit, though one, takes new forms in all things that live. He is within all, and is also outside.

As the wind, though one, takes new forms in whatever it enters, the Spirit, though one, takes new forms in all things that live. He is within all, and is also outside.

As the sun that beholds the world is untouched by earthly impurities, so the Spirit that is in all things is untouched by external sufferings.

There is one Ruler, the Spirit that is in all things, who transforms his own form into many. Only the wise who see him in their souls attain the joy eternal.

He is the Eternal among things that pass away, pure Consciousness of conscious beings, the ONE who fulfils the prayers of many. Only the wise who see him in their souls attain the peace eternal.

'This is That' – thus they realize the ineffable joy supreme. How can 'This' be known? Does he give light or does he reflect light?

There the sun shines not, nor the moon, nor the stars; lightnings shine not there and much less earthly fire. From his light all these give light, and his radiance illumines all creation.

PART 6

The Tree of Eternity has its roots in heaven above and its branches reach down to earth. It is Brahman, pure Spirit, who in truth is called the Immortal. All the worlds rest on that Spirit and beyond him no one can go:

This in truth is That.

The whole universe comes from him and his life burns through the whole universe. In his power is the majesty of thunder. Those who know him have found immortality.

From fear of him fire burns, and from fear of him the sun shines. From fear of him the clouds and the winds, and death itself, move on their way.

If one sees him in this life before the body passes away, one is free from bondage; but if not, one is born and dies again in new worlds and new creations.

Brahman is seen in a pure soul as in a mirror clear, and also in the Creator's heaven as clear as light; but in the land of shades as remembrance of dreams, and in the world of spirits as reflections in trembling waters.

When the wise man knows that the material senses come not from the Spirit, and that their waking and sleeping belong to their own nature, then he grieves no more.

Beyond the senses is the mind, and beyond mind is reason, its essence. Beyond reason is the Spirit in man, and beyond this is the Spirit of the universe, the evolver of all.

And beyond is Purusha, all-pervading, beyond definitions. When a mortal knows him, he attains liberation and reaches immortality.

His form is not in the field of vision: no one sees him with mortal eyes. He is seen by a pure heart and by a mind and thoughts that are pure. Those who know him attain life immortal.

When the five senses and the mind are still, and reason itself rests in silence, then begins the Path supreme.

This calm steadiness of the senses is called Yoga. Then

one should become watchful, because Yoga comes and goes.

Words and thoughts cannot reach him and he cannot be seen by the eye. How can he then be perceived except by him who says 'He is'?

In the faith of 'He is' his existence must be perceived, and he must be perceived in his essence. When he is perceived as 'He is', then shines forth the revelation of his essence.

When all desires that cling to the heart are surrendered, then a mortal becomes immortal, and even in this world he is one with Brahman.

When all the ties that bind the heart are unloosened, then a mortal becomes immortal. This is the sacred teaching.

One hundred and one subtle ways come from the heart. One of them rises to the crown of the head. This is the way that leads to immortality; the others lead to different ends.

Always dwelling within all beings is the Atman, the Purusha, the Self, a little flame in the heart. Let one with steadiness withdraw him from the body even as an inner stem is withdrawn from its sheath. Know this pure immortal light; know in truth this pure immortal light.

And Nachiketas learnt the supreme wisdom taught by the god of after-life, and he learnt the whole teaching of inner-union, of Yoga. Then he reached Brahman, the Spirit Supreme, and became immortal and pure. So in truth will anyone who knows his Atman, his higher Self.



PRASNA UPANISHAD

FIRST QUESTION

SUKESA BHARADVAJA, Saibya Satyakama, Sauryayani Gargya, Kausalya Asvalayana, Bhargava Vaidarbhi and Kaban-dhi Katyayana were students filled with devotion for Brahman, the Supreme Spirit; their minds rested on Brahman, and they were in search of the Highest Brahman. Once they said: 'The holy Pippalada can explain all the sacred teaching'; and, thus thinking, they approached him, bringing as a sign of reverence fuel for the sacred fire.

The sage said to them: Remain another year in steadiness, purity and faith. Ask then anything you desire and, if I know, I will tell you all.

When the time came, Kabandhi Katyayana approached the sage and said: Master, whence came all created beings?

The sage replied: In the beginning, the Creator longed for the joy of creation. He remained in meditation, and then came Rayi, matter, and Prana, life. 'These two', thought he, 'will produce beings for me'.

The sun is life and the moon is matter. All that has form, solid or subtle, is matter: therefore form is matter.

When the rising morning sun enters the eastern skies, then he bathes in his light all life that is in the East. And then the South and the West and the North and all the sky are illumined by that light that gives life to all that lives.

Thus rises the sun as fire, as life in its infinite variety. It was said in a verse of the *Rig Veda*:

'The sun is rising in golden radiance! The sun of a thousand rays in a hundred regions abiding; the god omniscient, the aim of all prayers; the light and fire supreme, the infinite life of all beings.'

The Lord of Creation is in truth the time of the year.